

FISHING BOUNTIES.

SPEECH

OF

HON. NEHEMIAH ABBOTT, OF MAINE.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 10, 1859.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. ABBOTT said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN : I have sought the floor at the present time for the purpose of saying a few words in opposition to a bill which passed the Senate at the last session of Congress, repealing the fishing bounties. The passage of that bill would, in my judgment, be a great injury to the country generally, as well as an act of gross injustice to the people of that section engaged in the fisheries. My constituents, along the sea coast, from Frankfort to Wiscasset, are deeply interested in this question, and I should be unfaithful to the trust they have reposed in me, were I to be silent when their rights and their interests are so deeply involved. Our fisheries, although local—and even outside of the Union, so far as the place where the fish are taken is concerned—are, nevertheless, eminently national; national in the consumption of their products, national in their effects upon our commerce, our navies, and the defences of our country.

I propose, in what few remarks I make within the hour allotted to me, to point out some of the effects of our fisheries upon the great interests of the country, and to show the folly and injustice of striking them down, by the withdrawal of the protection they are now receiving at the hands of the Government. Nowhere is the fishing business a self-sustaining

business; yet the great commercial nations of the world—Great Britain, France, Holland, and the United States—have ever deemed it for their interest and safety to foster and sustain that branch of industry by bounties or other protection; and all of these nations, except the United States, have recently increased their bounties, or protection, for the purpose of stimulating their people to embark in the business. They protect and uphold their fisheries, from national considerations. They look upon them as nurseries to rear and educate a hardy and efficient race of seamen to man their merchant and naval ships; and they are too wise to dispense with them, although they require increased protection; whilst the United States, with more commerce and less naval force, as if determined on their own injury, are seeking to destroy their fisheries, by withdrawing the little protection they now receive. There is no nation on earth so deeply interested in the maintenance of its fisheries as the United States; yet the United States, or the men who control the Government, are the only men who fail to see it. Our fisheries are sources of national power, without the burdens which usually accompany such power.

Unlike the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, the true policy of our free Government is to exempt the people from the oppressive burdens of large standing armies and navies, and to enable them to spend the fruits of their labor in fitting

themselves and their children for the great and responsible duties of freemen. Yet a free people must always be prepared to defend themselves against foreign aggressions. Their flag and their rights will not be respected, unless they possess the means of redressing wrongs and insults, from whatever quarter they may come. Our means of redressing wrongs and insults from without, will never be found in large standing armies and navies, while the people are true to themselves and to the Government they have established. Having retained the sovereign power in themselves, they will not oppress and degrade themselves to a level with the miserable victims of despotism, by the imposition of unnecessary burdens. Large standing armies and navies are the instrumentalities by which despots and tyrants rob the people of their rights. The strength of the Governments of the Old World lies in the magnitude and the efficiency of their armies and navies; in the ability of the *few*, through their engines of war, to oppress and over-tax the many, for their exclusive benefit; in the power to rob industry of her earnings, to uphold a system of odious distinctions. On the contrary, the strength of our free Government lies in the material resources of the country, and in the spirit and patriotism of the people to apply those resources in defence of their rights and their liberties, whenever occasion requires. The strength of a despotism, or a monarchy, or an aristocracy, is the weakness of a republic. The one stands on the implements of death; the other on the spirit of life that animates the hearts of a nation of freemen. The one stands on the fears of the people; the other on the love they bear to their country, and the ability to manifest their love in its defence. Our national defence lies principally in our citizen soldiery, and in the ready means of fitting out a sufficient number of privateersmen to cripple and destroy the commerce of a hostile Power; and not in standing armies and navies, which impoverish and debase the people. Protect our fisheries, and the means of naval defence will always be within our reach.

Whenever the United States shall become involved in a war with any of the leading Powers of Europe, our merchant vessels will be thrown out of employment

during the war, and they will rot at the wharves, unless engaged in privateering. Hence, so far as vessels are concerned, the means for our naval defence will always be at hand on the breaking out of war; and, if we are wise enough to extend suitable protection to our fisheries, we shall have brave men enough to man them, and carry our flag proudly and triumphantly into the very rivers, bays, and harbors, of the enemy, and compel him to sue for an early and an honorable peace, as they did Great Britain in the war of 1812. Our privateersmen, or rather our means of fitting them out at a moment's warning, in numbers sufficient to sweep the commerce of any nation from the ocean, enable us, more than any other cause, to maintain friendly relations with the jealous and antagonistic Powers of Europe. That branch of our national defence is our greatest safeguard against foreign aggressions, foreign wars, and their terrible consequences to life and property. It is feared ten-fold more by the commercial nations of Europe, than all the *regular* defensive force of the country. It was instrumental in an eminent degree in terminating both of our unnatural and onerous wars with the mother country. Its power reached the pockets of her merchants and business men, and they, to save their vessels and their merchandise from the grasp of our intrepid privateersmen, forced their Government to sue for peace. In the Revolutionary war, our privateersmen were our only naval defence, and they were fitted out and manned almost exclusively by our gallant Eastern fishermen. During that war they hovered about the channels and great thoroughfares of British commerce, and, unaided by any other naval force, captured over seven hundred of the enemy's vessels, laden with rich cargoes of merchandise and munitions of war. In the war of 1812 they co-operated with the small naval force furnished by the Government, and, in conjunction with that force, they captured between two and three thousand British vessels; and if the war had not been speedily terminated, British merchantmen would soon have ceased to plow the ocean, except under strong naval escorts. In these remarks, I am not unmindful of the gallant services of our regular naval force; but that force is too small, and ever will

be too small, if we adhere to the true principles of our free Government, to excite the fears of great rival and warlike nations. All such nations are fully aware of the smallness of our navy. They are also fully aware that a free people cannot take upon themselves the burdens of standing armies and navies equal to their own, without jeopardizing their liberties; hence, the fear of our standing armies and navies will not restrain such foreign Powers from infringements of our rights.

Now, peace, *peace* with all the world, is our true policy. To have it, all the world must fear our power; and, as our chief power to injure an enemy consists in our ability to cover the ocean with privateersmen, at a moment's warning, manned by fearless Eastern seamen, schooled on the decks of our fishing crafts, is it wise to destroy our fisheries? wise to cut off our chief source of power? Cannot the wisdom of this House see the connection of our fisheries with the defences of the country? When the House considers that the Government expends only \$300,000 on this branch of our national defence annually, and \$25,000,000 on our regular army and navy, will it not regard it with some degree of favor? If \$25,000,000 is the largest sum the Government can afford to expend, annually, for the defences of the country, (and I admit that that sum is much more than it ought to expend,) will it not be as well to preserve both arms of our national defence, by reducing the expenditures of the regular army and navy to \$24,700,000, and let the other \$300,000 go to the fishermen, to sustain our fisheries? Men, *men*, on their farms, in their workshops, on the decks of their vessels, engaged in productive industry, inspired with that fervent, ever-living patriotism which springs from the enjoyment of an economical and free Government, are our bulwarks against invasions from without, and not a hireling, non-producing soldiery. Love of freedom, freedom to enjoy the fruits of their labor, undiminished by onerous military or civil impositions, is the great motive power which ever has impelled, and ever will impel, our people to deeds of valor in the defence of their country's rights. It was this that crowned our revolutionary efforts with success; this that gave us the victory in the war of

1812; this that covered our armies in Mexico with so much glory. Hence, to preserve and augment our power to resist foreign encroachments, is to augment the material resources of the country by upholding all of its legitimate enterprises, and by diminishing its enormous and unnecessary expenditures; for there can be no enduring patriotism, no continuing love of country, swelling the hearts of a people writhing under oppressive burdens. Every dollar filched from the pockets of the people, to sustain large military and naval armaments, or large corps of civil plunderers of the public Treasury, lessens the pecuniary means of the country, lessens the patriotism of the people, and, consequently, lessens the defensive power of the Government. Then let the Government guard its fisheries with a jealous care, as sources of national power. Let it cease to make large appropriations for the purpose of rewarding political partisans by Government contracts. Let it cease to sustain a corrupt and corrupting army of diplomatic, custom-house, and other agents, who are not wanted in the public service. Let it save fifty million dollars annually of the people's money, which is now squandered to uphold a rotten and shameless Administration, and all its vital functions will be restored to their original health and vigor. It will regain the confidence and esteem of a wronged and outraged people. The past may then be forgotten. The future may be full of hope.

Again, our commerce, foreign and domestic, locking within its mighty embrace all the great interests of our whole country, calls no less loudly for the preservation of our fisheries than does our power to repel invasion. There has ever been an intimate connection between the fisheries of a country and its commercial and naval successes. In all ages of the world, and in all nations where commerce has flourished or navies have covered themselves with glory, the fisheries have been regarded as the best and cheapest schools for the education of seamen, and one of the chief causes of their triumphs. Venice so regarded them when she was the acknowledged mistress of the ocean, when her dominion was absolute and undisputed over the waters of the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas; and when her fish-

eries ceased to be objects of public concernment, her power declined. They were so regarded by France and England in all their controversies, treaties, and wars, from the treaty of St. Germain's, in 1632, when Nova Scotia was given to France, down to the war of 1756, when Great Britain became the permanent possessor of all the French possessions in Canada. They were so regarded by the British provinces in America, and the mother country, anterior to the Revolution; and the mother country, at a very early period, began to manifest jealousy of the growing power of her provinces, principally on account of the number, hardihood, and manly independence, of the seamen reared in their fisheries. The act of the British Parliament, passed in 1775, prohibiting certain of their Eastern colonies from fishing on the Grand Banks, proves the existence of that early jealousy. They have been so regarded since our Revolution, by England and the United States, as all the treaties, negotiations, and diplomatic correspondence, between the two countries, clearly attest; and whenever either of these great maritime nations shall fail to so regard them, its commerce and its naval strength will be impaired. They were so regarded by the Continental Congress, when, in 1779, it instructed John Adams, the colonial Minister at the Court of St. James, that "*the common right of fishing must in no case be given up, and that that right was essential to the prosperity of all the States.*" Fisher Ames so regarded them, when he said, "*they will enrich, while they will protect, the nation.*" They were so regarded by that great apostle of genuine Democracy, Thomas Jefferson, who, in 1791, when he was Secretary of State, said, "*we have two nurseries for forming seamen—our coasting trade and our fisheries.*" And who again, when he was President of the United States, in a message addressed to Congress, in 1802, said:

"To cultivate peace, and maintain commerce and navigation, in all their lawful enterprises, and to foster our fisheries as nurseries of navigation, are the landmarks by which we are to guide ourselves in all our proceedings."

General Knox, Commodore Stewart, John Q. Adams, and Daniel Webster, have all borne testimony equally strong in

favor of the national importance of our fisheries. Sir, I might sustain this position by quoting the uniform opinions of our statesmen, military and naval officers, from the days of Washington to the present time; but it would be an unnecessary waste of the time of this House; for no man, in my judgment, can fail to recognise the importance of our fisheries as schools for the rearing of seamen, unless he is blinded by sectional bigotry, and his eyes utterly closed to the truths of history and the teachings of experience; and to such men, I trust, I am not speaking. The war of 1812 checked, for the time being, the natural development of our country's resources, and was looked upon with great disfavor by the American people; yet so conscious was our Government of the national importance of our fisheries, as aids to our commerce and naval defences, that our peace commissioners at Ghent—Adams, Clay, Gallatin, Bayard, and Russell—were peremptorily instructed not to permit our rights to them to be discussed even; but to "*terminate negotiations the moment those rights should be brought into question.*"

Sir, such was the policy of our Government then. Such has been its policy from that day to the birth of this bill, in the Senate, at the last session of this Congress. Yet, strange to say, that now, when our commerce has found its way to the remotest corners of the earth, and has outgrown that of any other nation, and needs, more than ever, a continuance of that policy, it is proposed by the *conservative* branch of Congress to change it, to cut down our fisheries, to cripple our commerce, and weaken our defences. Our growing commerce, which is necessary to the prosperity of every section of our country, furnishing employment to Northern laborers, artisans, and navigators, and to the South and the West the means of transporting their vast and ever-increasing surplus products to the best markets the world affords, however distant or difficult of access, demands more native-born officers and native-born seamen in its service. Even now, with the immense number annually supplied by our fisheries, it is impossible to obtain the requisite number. What, then, must be the condition of our commerce when Congress shall have cut off that prolific source

of supply? Take from our commerce the fifty thousand native-born seamen, who have been schooled in our fisheries, and it must languish for want of capable and efficient seamen to perform its nautical labors. The ship-owners and merchants in our Atlantic cities, from New Orleans to Calais, have, for several years, seen and felt the necessity of more native-born seamen in the merchant service; and, at the last session of the present Congress, they sent in a memorial praying for the passage of a law to remedy the defect. They asked Congress to make it compulsory on the owners of each merchant vessel to educate annually, on ship-board, at their own expense, a certain number of American boys. But it is manifest that Congress does not possess the power to impose such a ruinous tax on the ship-owners of our country; and if it did, the exercise of it would prove utterly inadequate to the accomplishment of the object sought. If there were no other reason for protecting our fisheries, the fact that we want more native-born seamen to sustain our vast and growing commerce is sufficient of itself. The sons of our hardy fishermen, from their childhood up to manhood, during the summer season, are on the ocean with their fathers, learning the art of practical seamanship, and in winters in our common schools, fitting themselves to occupy the first places in the commerce of their country. When thus educated and matured, they naturally seek and engage in the business for which they are so preeminently qualified. Indeed, the little State of Maine, with only six Representatives on this floor, builds and mans, in whole or in part, one-third of all the vessels built in the United States, and four-fifths of all her seamen have been schooled on the decks of our fishing crafts.

Sir, the repeal of the fishing-bounty act, at this time, would not only subject our Government to the charge of imbecility, but also to the charge of wanton and gross injustice towards that section of the country engaged in the fishing business. Upon the principle of common justice, that act is *irrepealable*. Its enactment was an invitation by the Government to the people to invest their means in the enterprise. When Congress passed that act, it virtually said to the free citizens of the North, the fishing business is known not to be a

remunerative business; but the great interests of the Union require that it should be prosecuted; and, if you will embark in it, your investments shall be protected, and made remunerative by assistance from the National Treasury. The exact amount of the assistance was then fixed and established, as a motive to the investments that have been since made. Trusting in the good faith of the Government, our honest fishermen invested their money and labor in fishing-vessels, fish-wharves, fish-yards, fish-houses, and other fixtures necessary to the prosecution of the business. They now have on hand over two thousand fishing vessels engaged in the cod-fisheries, with the necessary fixtures for drying and curing the fish when taken, exceeding, in value, four million dollars, all of which was invested upon the invitation and good faith of the Government, and all, or nearly all, of which will be lost to the owners, if the Government withdraws the bounty. The vessels are too small, and their models illy adapted to the coasting trade, or any other business. The property invested in the fisheries is valueless for any other purpose. Cut off the bounty, and you will cut down the business; for under the recent reciprocity treaty with England, opening our ports to provincial fish and other products, duty free, it will be impossible for our fishermen to compete *without* protection, with their provincial neighbors *with* protection. Cut off the bounty, and our fishing vessels will cease to be school-houses for the education of seamen. Cut it off, and our Government will stand convicted of leading an honest and confiding corps of fishermen into the investment of more than four millions of their hard earnings, and then turning round and destroying it, by a wanton act of its sovereign power. Cut it off, and you will cut off so much of the revenue of the country as is now derived from the duties on imported salt used in curing fish caught by our fishermen. Our fish markets must be supplied by provincial fishermen; and their fish, under the recent treaty, (and consequently the salt used in curing them,) will be received free of duty. Cut it off, and you will weaken our national defences, injure our commerce, destroy all the property invested in our fisheries, drive our hardy fishermen from their accustomed employment, and

thereby leave an open field for the exclusive benefit of foreign nations.

Sir, I protest against such national folly; I protest against such legislative injustice towards that section of the country I in part represent. The legislative action of a country should be just towards its several parts. The rights of no section should be disregarded or overlooked, however small or distant. With us, unjust legislation is intolerable; and whilst the spirit of our fathers animates the hearts of the people, they will not submit to it. Every true friend of the Union will look upon the authors of it with loathing and disgust. In the language of the Constitution, our Union was formed "*to establish justice.*" Justice, emanating from our National Government, and spreading itself over every section of our vast and diversified country, is, and ever must be, the bond of union between these United States. Ignore that, and our glorious Union will break into fragments. Ignore that, and the Union will not be worth preserving; for the end of our Government is the absolute protection of human rights, persons, and property.

Sir, I rejoice in the belief that the popular heart of this great Republic is alive to the principles of equity and justice. It is the strongest evidence of the capacity of man for self-government. In it, I see the perpetuity of our free institutions. In it, I see the end, in the distance, of organized governmental inhumanity and oppression. Where it exists, political men and political parties cannot disregard it with impunity. They may for a time spurn its admonitions, trample it under their feet, but the day of retribution will speedily overtake them. So sure as justice liveth in the popular mind, so sure will it ultimately manifest itself in outward expression, and hurl from place and power wicked and unjust rulers.

Now, I respectfully submit for the consideration of this House, is it just for Congress, by bounties, to induce the people of Maine and Massachusetts to invest their money, for the general good, in a non-productive business; and then, after the investment is made, change its policy, withdraw the bounty, and thereby destroy the property invested, and ruin the men engaged in the business? Such an act would be equivalent to taking private

property for public uses without just compensation. Hence I maintain that Congress takes away the bounty from fishermen, it is not only bound by every principle of justice, but also by the spirit, if not the letter, of the Constitution itself, to make an appropriation to pay them the losses they will sustain. Protection granted to a particular branch of industry which is deemed to be of national importance, and which involves an outlay of capital in works unfit for any other purpose, is in the nature of a *contract*; and to withdraw it without indemnity, is dishonorable in a Government as the violation of its technical obligations. Eleven-twelfths of the property which will be destroyed by the passage of this bill is owned by the people of Maine and Massachusetts, and I am unwilling that the whole loss should fall on them. If the Government shall be foolish enough to change its wise, national, and time-honored policy of protection to its fisheries, let the loss occasioned by the change be borne equally by the whole country. If the Government cannot or will not see its true interest, it can be just towards the especial victims of its folly. The provision in the bill, postponing the time when it shall take effect, will not materially diminish the loss. To go on with the business, the vessels and fixtures must be kept in repair; and, consequently, when the bill goes into operation, whether it be two or ten years hence, the amount of property to be affected by it will be nearly the same.

I am opposed to this bill because of its tendency to excite and keep alive sectional feelings. Ostensibly it is the child of the Democratic party, but in reality it is the child of a few Southern dictators of the Democratic party, who control that party, and through that party control the Government of the country. These dictators of the Democratic party seem to be inspired with a jealous hatred of free labor and free institutions. Acting in obedience to such inspiration, they are now wielding the entire powers of the Government in hostility to everything free, from the *soil* on which we stand to the men who till it; and the *free* fishermen of the far East are the victims of their hatred to be reached by this bill. In the name of Democracy, they ask these confiding sons of the ocean to

to keep them and their tools in power; and, as a reward for their confidence and their votes, they propose to rob them of their substance, to beggar their wives and their children, by an act of the grossest injustice; and all for the purpose of gratifying their malignant feeling against free laborers. If protection is needed to uphold a Northern interest, the system is regarded by these dictators as manifestly unequal; if needed to uphold a Southern interest, no such inequality is perceptible. A paltry sum is wanted to sustain our New England fisheries, they hold that it is better to let them perish than to violate a great principle; but, if double the amount is wanted to sustain the sugar business in Louisiana, it may be taken without objection. A postal system that takes millions from the free States to pay deficiencies in the slave States, they regard as equal; but just and trifling aids to a free-trade business, unequal. The door of the National Treasury is closed against every enterprise carried on by free labor and free capital, whilst it is wide open and prodigal in the bestowment of its gifts on whatever is supposed to promote the institution of slavery, or the interests of the men who uphold it. It is wrong, in their opinion, to take a few hundred thousand dollars to arm a corps of free and intrepid seamen against our naval, privateer, and merchant ships, but it is right to take \$3,000,000 to build a custom-house in New Orleans; right to take \$2,000,000 more to build another in Charleston, South Carolina; right to take \$10,000,000 to eradicate from the hearts of the people of Kansas, by military force, the love of Freedom; right to squander \$60,000,000 of the public money annually, to reward partisans, in the great democratic crusade against the spirit of Christian civilization; right to spend hundreds upon hundreds of millions in the acquisition of Cuba, Mexico, and Central America, for the purpose of opening new fields for the extension of human bondage; it is *wrong* to be just to our *few* fishermen, who, in time of war, repel invasion, and make our flag respected and feared by all nations; and, in time of peace, brave the dangers of the northern seas and storms, to add to their country's prosperity and glory.

But, sir, I turn from the contemplation of such sectional favoritism, under the be-

lief that the time is not far distant when this Government will be administered by wise, patriotic, and national men, upon the principles enunciated by the fathers of the Republic. I turn from the contemplation of the sectional bitterness that now exists in this country, with feelings of profound regret. Its fruits are evil, and nothing but evil; and, besides, there is no occasion for it. There are no sectional antagonisms in this country, but the antagonisms of opinion, and they are confined almost exclusively to the subject of Slavery. Now, as the system of Slavery is, by the Constitution, local, subject to State control alone, the antagonisms of opinion on that subject ought not to disturb our social relations, or the harmony of the country, any more than the antagonisms of opinion on the subject of religion, ethics, or any other question of conscience. Whilst it is the duty of every man to exert, to the full extent of his power, a *moral* influence in the promotion of truth and humanity, it is not his duty to quarrel with his neighbor, whose opinions may differ from his own. Reason and sympathy are antidotes for perversities of conscience, not blows. The diversities of soil, climate, and productions, in our wide-spread country, are not antagonisms, but bonds of concord and friendship.

The various branches of industry peculiar to different localities are so interlocked as to promote each other. The prosperity of one promotes the prosperity of all. New England factories and workshops create markets for southern and western products. New England ships transport the vast surplus cottons, grains, and meats, of the South and West, to the best markets the world affords, however remote. In return, those products give profitable employment to New England commerce and navigation. One section of the country feeds, another clothes, and another manufactures for the whole. Hence, the growth and prosperity of each section promotes the growth and prosperity of all the rest. Lop off any part of our glorious Union, East, West, North, or South, and the Union would be imperfect. As a whole, it contains all the elements of a mighty and prosperous empire. Disjoin it, and God only can foresee the consequences. Let, then, the whole country be just towards its several parts.

Let sectional animosities cease. Let the people of all sections become as firmly united in friendship, as the diversities of the country have united them in interest. That result will be attained so soon as the politicians of the country shall turn *statesmen*, and cease to stir the fires of sectional discord which they themselves have fanned into a devouring flame for selfish ends.

The demon of discord is now preying upon the vitals of our free institutions. He is the spiritual and temporal adviser of the men who now control this Government. He bids them talk, and think, and act, exclusively with a view to sectional power and sectional aggrandizement; and they obey him. Sir, it is time to rebuke this fell spirit of discord, which stands in the way of our country's peace and prosperity. Let us, the representatives of the people, set our faces squarely against it. Let every patriotic American citizen plant himself squarely on the Constitution, live up to its provisions, demand what is right

and just, and submit to nothing that is wrong or unjust, and the reign of small narrow, and sectional politicians will soon be over. A man whose patriotism is not coextensive with the Union, whose love of country is circumscribed and bounded by geographical lines, who delights in adding fuel to the fires of sectional discord, who cannot mete out even-handed justice to every portion of our common country, is unfit to occupy a place in the councils of the nation. He may be a *politician*. He may have stood upon the stump before an admiring multitude. He may have the *Honorable* attached to his name, but he will never rise to the dignity of a *statesman*.

Sir, in conclusion, as the Representative of a portion of our Eastern fishermen, I ask the members of this House to see that their rights are respected—that simple justice is accorded to them. I ask for nothing more, and I shall not be satisfied with anything less.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

BUELL & BLANCHARD, PRINTERS.

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